

terrorism

U.S. girds for more attacks on envoys

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The head of President Nixon's interagency task force on terrorism expects further incidents of the kind in which two American diplomats died recently in Khartoum. He indicates that United States resources to combat such dangers are stretched too thin.

Armin Meyer, the diplomat from Lincoln, Ill., who manned Washington's radio to Khartoum thruout the 24-hour siege, said in an exclusive interview with The Tribune that intelligence had hinted such an attack might occur but did not say where.

Terrorism is already of epidemic proportions, Meyer says. Manpower to fight it is becoming a serious problem, he adds.

The 30-year career diplomat, who served recently as ambassador to Japan and previously to Iran and Lebanon, notes that because the Palestinian extremists did not achieve their objective in Khartoum—the release of one of their leaders held in Jordan—they are likely to strike again.

The interview follows:

Q.—WE UNDERSTAND that recently there was a meeting of the working group on terrorism. Can you tell us in what areas we can expect to see precautionary activity as a result of the Sudanese tragedy?

A.—In our meeting we examined what more we can or should do to protect Americans abroad—officials and other Americans—beyond what we're doing now [and] to protect foreign officials in our own country. As you know, we've taken quite a number of steps in the last few months since the Munich tragedy to shore up our defenses against this kind of activity. My impression is, however, that be-

Q and A

This interview with Armin Meyer, head of President Nixon's task force on terrorism, was conducted by Tribune Washington reporters Aldo Beckman, Louise Hutchinson, John Maclean, and Frank Starr, Washington Bureau chief.

cause of the current epidemic proportions, more will have to be done. Until now, we've been trying to live within our normal manpower limitations. It may be we'll have to expand some of our protective services and activities for screening people coming into the country, for taking care of our people overseas, perhaps sending more security officers to our overseas posts. All of that means budget and manpower problems.

Q.—Have any of our embassies, particularly in the Middle East, asked for more security since the Sudanese event?

A.—Since then we have sent three alerts to all our embassies around the world pointing out that the terrorists in Khartoum did not achieve their aim, which was primarily the release of one of their ringleaders who is being held captive in Jordan. Therefore, it is not unlikely that they will decide to strike again elsewhere.

Q.—YOU SAID you are also concerned with increasing protection of foreign diplomats here.

A.—Very definitely. As one who has spent two-thirds of my 30 years in the diplomatic career abroad, I have often been impressed by the contrast in the protection offered American diplomats abroad and that which we offer here.

The host country is responsible for the protection of foreign officials. We last year got

thru Congress a special law which makes a federal offense of such crimes as kidnapping, assault, murder, harassment against any foreign officials, including family and staff, not only ambassadors as it had been heretofore. We have about 137,000 people covered by this new legislation, but we don't have further protective services and we didn't ask for them at the time.

Q.—WOULD YOUR concern regarding diplomats in this country be specifically with the Black September organization?

A.—No. As a matter of fact, while the present interest is in the terrorist situation in the Middle East there are numerous other instances of it here and abroad. In this country, for example, two Turkish diplomats were murdered recently in California.

Q.—Are the diplomats here asking for more protection?

A.—There have been many requests from the diplomats recently. There is growing concern, and our resources are getting stretched tighter.

Q.—WHAT CAN you do about that? You mentioned earlier that the new law did not provide for increased resources.

A.—I want to make clear that while that law makes such acts a federal offense, it does not remove the jurisdiction for any of these crimes from local authorities. It doesn't mean that the federal government has to handle such problems when they hap-

pen in Chicago or New York. It means the local authorities are still primarily responsible, but that the federal government will work with them. So we still are counting heavily on the local police, and some of them complain that they don't have the manpower to take care of consular officials and foreign visitors in their districts, that it's an added burden.

This is a serious problem. We understand their problem, and we understand our limitations. The question is how you provide adequate protection.

Q.—You're assessing this problem now?

A.—You can't find a bodyguard for every foreign official in this country or for every American official abroad. But you should be able to cover most situations where there is the greatest likelihood of action.

Q.—ONE OF THE tools that might be most effective is intelligence. Do we have any indication that there was increased activity among the Black September people prior to the Sudan incident?

A.—We got a constant stream of reports on all types of terrorist activity. One of our main challenges has been to try to bring this information into focus and to try to determine where the greatest likelihood is.

I will say that in our weekly meeting the day before this happened we did have a report including a specific and detailed account of the fact that the Black September movement was very upset that the ringleader, Abou Daoud, was in custody in Jordan. They were quite anxious to do something to get him released. That much, of course, was fairly evident, that they might try something to release one of their leaders. But — where, was another question.

Q.—DID WE WARN our embassies on the basis of this?

A.—Well, they've been on a constant alert. This is not the first time something like this

continued

Q.—With the benefit of hindsight, is there any way this incident could have been prevented, short of just not going to the party where it occurred?

A.—I honestly don't see any way that that could have been prevented by anything that was available to anybody connected with the security situation, unless there had been some direct indication there was to be some activity there.

Q.—WE WERE TOLD you were the man on this end of the radio conversations during part of this terrible siege.

A.—I was there around the clock.

Q.—What kind of advice were you giving our embassy there?

A.—It's a long story. We've made a chronology of it. Whenever we get a report of this kind, as we did about three weeks ago when our ambassador in Haiti telephoned in and said some gunmen were there with a pistol at his head, immediately we assemble a task force at our operations center.

We have direct contact with a foreign capital and to the extent possible with our post. We do it thru our embassies. In both cases, the ambassador and number two man were out of commission so you get down to junior officers. So one of the first things we always consider is should we send a special mission out there to help, and to provide some senior rank for communications. This we did in both cases, in Haiti and Khartoum. In Haiti it took only about three hours, but in Khartoum it took 15 hours. We considered right at the start whether it was desirable to send someone. It would take 15 hours to get there, and they had set a deadline of four hours or something like that. We still decided to do it.

BEYOND THAT, one of the first things we did was to telegraph to our post guidance on how we believe events of this kind should be handled. It was, in brief, that we don't think there should be capitulation to the demands of the terrorists and to the extent possible to continue negotiations. We hoped somehow or other they would in the end agree to release the hostages free and

safe. Now this means the terrorists' own safe passage.

We might go along with that, if there is no capitulation to any of their demands. We call it the Bangkok solution. That's what happened in Bangkok; the terrorists did agree to release their hostages [in return] for their own safe passage, but none of their demands were met.

We carried this contact on thruout the hours there. It involved letting them know Mr. [William] Macomber was coming, how he was coming, getting overflight rights, getting information from them. There were two or three proposals made out at the scene on what we might do, and we provided our replies to them. There was never a specific request for yielding on specific demands.

Q.—AT ANY POINT did the Secretary of State or the White House talk to the president of the Sudan?

A.—No. But the Secretary of State was very much involved, and our embassy in Khartoum was aware that not only the secretary but the President were interested and that the guidance coming from our control center had the support of both.

Q.—There's been some suggestion that because Ambassador Macomber had to stop in Cairo and there was some time lost there it did cause concern to the terrorists and may have led to the shooting. Can you explain the stop in Cairo?

A.—Yes. There is a perfectly simple reason for that. During the course of his flight it was decided he should stop and come into Khartoum in a civilian aircraft rather than a military aircraft.

Q.—Why was that important?

A.—Because the Saudi embassy [where the hostages were held] is right next to the airport. There was concern that the terrorists might think a military operation was underway. So we considered several alternatives and decided on one where he would land in Cairo and continue on a commercial flight. The commercial flight was held up for two hours awaiting his arrival. But at the time he arrived in Egypt, at that very moment,

we had received a communication that there was a new proposal for moving the hostages to a third country. And because of that new proposal and our reply to it, there would have been no point in his going on to Khartoum. It would have been better for him to stay in Cairo.

However, that proposal was rejected about two hours after he was in Cairo. At that time he resumed his flight. In the meantime, two of his six-member party had taken that Sudan Airways plan to Khartoum. Their plane arrived at 9:30 and the executions actually took place at 9:06, so even if he had gone on as intended he would not have been there before the event occurred.

Q.—WHY DO YOU think our men were killed?

A.—I think there are a variety of reasons. I think primarily there was a fanatical determination to establish the credibility of the Black September movement. After the Bangkok affair there had been considerable criticism that they had failed in their mission. Obviously, the main objective was to get the release of their men in America. Perhaps they thought that killing Americans would show they meant business, but it had just the opposite effect. The Sudanese said, "Now that you've done this, you can't even leave this country."

I think perhaps the shooting down of the Libyan airliner might have gotten some of the Arab terrorists more excited than normal.

The fact that there had been visits to this country by King Hussein, by an Egyptian representative, Mr. Ismail, and the prime minister of Israel, Mrs. Meir, might have indicated to some of the Palestinian extremists that there could have been the possibility of some modus vivendi in the Middle East and that would be counter to their own ideas which are that they hope to turn the clock back to 1947. So they may have had a certain amount of interest in torpedoing anything that moves in the direction of peace.

ists choose the embassy of a

very wealthy Arab country—Saudi Arabia—that has helped support Al Fatah and also in a country—Sudan with very strong Arab ties? Psychologically doesn't that defeat their own purpose?

A.—Obviously, you have to get the answer from them. But my speculation is that they thought it would be quite clever to hold both Arabs and non-Arabs captive in order to get the release of this individual in Jordan. Then, after executing the Americans and not the Arab hostages, they would get some sympathy of less hostility than if they murdered some of their own Arab brothers.

Q.—Do you think, then, that as the time [of Middle East negotiation] comes closer, if in fact it does, that the danger from the Black September will increase?

A.—I can't comment as to the state of progress toward a settlement of the Middle East situation, but I would certainly think that if some miracle could occur whereby there were one, that it would do a great deal toward doing away with this terrorism situation.

Q.—I UNDERSTOOD you to say earlier that you thought that perhaps the feeling that there might be some way to gain peace had, in fact, been a factor in this Sudan incident. Aren't those contradictory statements?

A.—I don't think so. Assuming that you could get the Arab governments to agree to some sort of arrangement in the Middle East it would cast the terrorist movement in an entirely different light, because as of now the Arab governments themselves are in favor of some sort of restoration of Palestine and Palestine rights as they call them. But if they were to agree to some sort of arrangement I believe the terrorists would then not have the public sympathy or non-hostility and certainly the [Arab] governments would be in a better position to curb the activities of the terrorists.

Q.—When the letter-bomb scare broke I recall examples

being given of the possibility of kidnapping leading industrialists or leading business men. Is there a likelihood of that?

A.—Oh, I think it's an ever-present danger.

Q.—With a civilian would the federal government try to persuade civilian interests of its no-ransom philosophy?

A.—I don't know. We haven't addressed that question.

Q.—It's possible, then, that tourists, for example, might very well be taken hostage. Then we would be forced to address it?

A.—That's right. I wouldn't want to comment as to what we would do. In general, I think there's a belief that kow-towing to blackmail anywhere, any time is not the way to handle these things, for it just leads to more of it.

Q.—WHEN YOU HEAR about their situation, knowing the history of the Black September movement, did you fear that they were then, in effect, dead?

A.—Oh, one always has hope, but in all honesty this did seem to have some factors which caused more concern than normal, yes.

Q.—We understand that Ambassador Noel himself had been a member of the planning group that worked on the policy decision that there would be no participation in blackmail, so he himself must have had a very realistic view of what the situation was.

A.—Well, he and Moore were really outstandingly courageous in the way they handled this. The story we hear is that they walked off with perfect dignity, thanked the Saudi ambassador for the farewell reception that was given and marched down to the cellar where the executions took place. It was really a tremendous act of courage on their part.